



# Miami VA Healthcare System TROPICAL TOPICS

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## The Miami VA Healthcare System recognizes employees who are “Dedicated to Customer Service Excellence”

Beginning Spring 2006, the Miami VA Healthcare System implemented a new reward and recognition initiative whereby veteran patients, visitors, and other employees may recognize staff for outstanding quality, dedication, and leadership in customer service. “Dedicated to Customer Service Excellence” boards were displayed and cards are readily available throughout the hospital and clinics. When an employee is observed lending a helping hand, removing obstacles or just being attentive and courteous to a veteran, visitor or another employee; that person fills out a “Dedicated to Customer Service Excellence” card and hands it to the employee. The employee then takes the card to the Customer/Veteran Service Office and redeems it for a VISN 8/Miami VA logo item (i.e. pen, badge holder, key chain, etc.) and a Congratulations/Thank You card. At the end of the Quarter the Customer Service Committee holds a drawing and selects five winners who are then awarded a \$100 cash award along with a Special Contribution certificate.

This Program allows for a very simple, frequent, and creative way to not only recognize, but also motivate and improve employee performance and morale. The “Dedicated to Customer Service Excellence” Program

was developed by VISN 8’s Competency Development for Leaders in the 21st Century, Class of 2005 and subsequently tailored and quickly embraced by the Miami VA and its Customer Service Committee.

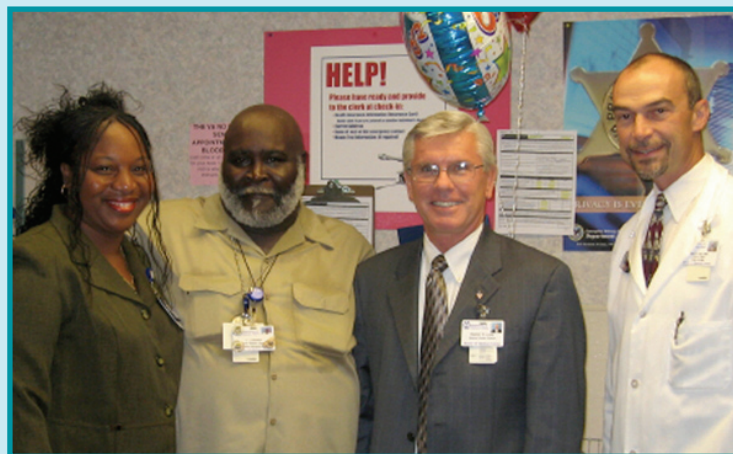
Mr. Stephen M. Lucas, Director and Dr. John R. Vara, Chief of Staff at the Miami VA Healthcare System presented the first cash awards and certificates on June 20th and 21st, 2006.



*Stephen M. Lucas, Director; Bacilio (Alex) Villar, Medical Support Assistant MAS (Winner); and Dr. Robert D. Shapiro, ACOS/Education & Performance Improvement and Acting Chief of Staff*



*Dotty Daniels, Supervisor, MAS; Stephen M. Lucas, Director; Dorothy Smith, Program Support Assistant MAS (Winner); and Dr. John Vara, Chief of Staff*



*Tonja Gray, MAS Supervisor; Erving Johnson (TJ) Medical Clerk, MAS (Winner); Stephen M. Lucas, Director; and Dr. John Vara, Chief of Staff*

Additional Photos page 2

## More "Excellence in Customer Service" Award Winners



*Dotty Daniels, Supervisor (MAS); Stephen M. Lucas, Director; Jaime Seise (Winner); and, Dr. Robert D. Shapiro, ACOS/Education & Performance Improvement and Acting Chief of Staff*



*Dr. Bruce Kava, Chief Urology Section, Judy Stockman, RN, Nurse Manager, Ambulatory Care, Dr. John Vara, Chief of Staff, Alric Ellison LPN (Winner), and Stephen M. Lucas, Director*

## The Miami VA Healthcare System welcomed Congressman Kendrick Meek, the 2006 Miss Florida Pageant contestants, and Miss Florida 2005



*Above: The contestants visited the patient units, and later participated in a reception where they autographed photographs for patients and employees. Several of the contestants performed for an audience in our auditorium as well.*

*Left: Jack Phillips, VAVS Representative, Marine Corps League and Congressman Kendrick Meek*

## Meet the Miami VA's Information Security Officer Mr. Anthony Brooks



Anthony Brooks is the new Information Security Officer (ISO) at the Miami VA Healthcare System. As the ISO, he is responsible for the management, coordination, and oversight of our security plans and policies to ensure the availability, integrity, and confidentiality of one of the most important assets the VA has: personal data. Mr. Brooks brings with him 15 years of government service as a systems and network administrator with contract companies such as Lockheed-Martin and Computer Data Systems. He can be reached via e-mail at [anthony.brooks2@va.gov](mailto:anthony.brooks2@va.gov).

## VA Receives 2006 Innovations in Government Award

The Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) model system of electronic health records, developed with extensive involvement of front-line health-care providers, has won the prestigious "Innovations in American Government Award." The annual award, sponsored by Harvard University's Ash Institute for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Kennedy School of Government and administered in partnership with the Council for Excellence in Government, honors excellence and creativity in the public sector.

"This great honor is testimony to the vision of health care professionals throughout VA," said the Honorable R. James Nicholson, Secretary of Veterans Affairs. "Our electronic health records are without peer and ensure that our nation's veterans receive the best care this country can provide."

While health-care costs in the United States continue to soar, VA is reducing costs and errors while increasing safety and efficiency. Outside of VA, because patient records are not readily available, one out of seven Americans ends up hospitalized when outpatient care is all that's needed. For the same reason, one out of five lab tests is needlessly repeated outside the VA system. And while the costs of health care continue to soar for most Americans, the VA is reducing costs, reducing errors, and becoming the model for what modern health care management and delivery should look like.

"The involvement of front-line providers, use of performance measures and universal use of electronic health records have enabled VA to set the national benchmark in quality of care" said Dr.

Jonathan Perlin, VA Under Secretary for Health. "The electronic records system is called VistA, and it is an essential part of VA's commitment to giving every patient safe, effective, efficient, compassionate health care."

VA's complete adoption of electronic health records and performance measures have resulted in high-quality, low-cost health care with high patient satisfaction. A recent RAND study found that VA outperforms all other sectors of American health care across a spectrum of 294 measures of quality in disease prevention and treatment. For six straight years, VA has led private-sector health care in the independent American Customer Satisfaction Index.

Electronic health records also provide numerous other benefits in cost, quality and access to care. The cost of maintaining the system is \$80 per patient per year, less than the cost of one unnecessarily repeated lab test. In the last 10 years, VistA's efficiencies have offset cost increases associated with a 100 percent increase in the number of veterans receiving VA care.

For example, VistA has helped VA save 6,000 lives by improving rates of pneumonia vaccination among veterans with emphysema, cutting pneumonia hospitalizations in half and reducing costs by \$40 million per year. Patient waiting times have

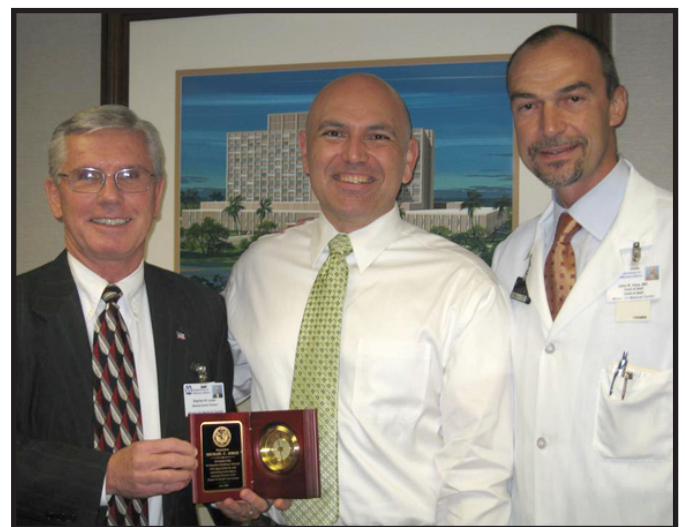
declined while customer service improved, and access to care has increased because of on-line availability of health information.

In addition to saving money, VistA saves lives and ensures continuity of care even under the most extreme circumstances. Many of the thousands of residents who fled the Gulf Coast because of Hurricane Katrina left behind vital health records. Records for the 40,000 veterans in the area were almost immediately available to clinicians across the country, even though the VA Medical Center in Gulfport, Mississippi, was destroyed and the New Orleans VA Medical Center was closed and evacuated. Veterans were able to resume their treatments, refill their prescriptions, and get the care they needed because their medical records were immediately accessible to providers at other VA facilities.

VistA is one of seven government initiatives chosen from 1,000 applications to receive this year's Innovations awards. Because the programs are models for government's capacity to do good, and do it well, the \$100,000 grant specifically supports sharing of program information with other organizations.

VA plans to disseminate information and provide demonstrations of VistA at its medical centers across the country. Additional information is available by visiting the website [www.innovations.va.gov](http://www.innovations.va.gov), calling 202-208-2393, sending an email message to [innovations@va.gov](mailto:innovations@va.gov) or contacting a local VA medical center.

### Dr. Jorge departs Miami VA for Private Sector



Stephen M. Lucas, Director and Dr. John R. Vara, Chief of Staff presented a farewell gift to Dr. Michael Jorge, Assistant Director on his last day Friday, July 21, 2006 at the Miami VA.

## Stepping With Pride 2006



The 2006 Stepping with PRIDE class graduated on June 29, 2006. Stepping with PRIDE is a first-level leadership development program for employees at the GS-8 level and below. Ably led by Eileen Marcial during the entire process, the class was divided into three project teams which presented their reports that day: **OEF/OIF Web-based Resource Project** (Liz Naranjo; Mary Apon-  
4 te; W. George Caspary; Elba Maymi; and Darryl Harden); **Employee Picnic** (Mary Jackson; Justine Jackson; Tracy Hill-Chiverton; Hans Bidon; and Cristina González); and, **Reorientation to Residents** (Maribel Mercado, Maybell Morgan, Samuel Carey, Kaitalyn Roker, Myra Campbell, and Barbara Carralero).

Another highlight of the event was a conference call during which VISN 8 Network Director George H. Gray, Jr., congratulated graduates visn-wide.

***Congratulations on a job well done to all!***



Florida Marlins players Logan Kensing, Mike Jacobs, and Chris Resop visited with veterans in the SICU and Nursing Home on July 20th. The players were at the Miami VA Medical Center as part of the *Major League Baseball Salutes America* campaign.

## The Miami VA welcomes new Public Affairs staff

### *Laura Pereda, webmaster*

Born in Havana, Cuba, Laura Pereda moved to Miami at the age of 8, where she has resided since. She received her computer programming certification from CDC, but did not immediately work in the field. She joined the Miami VA family in 1989, as secretary to the Special Assistant to the Director and his two Staff Assistants and remained in the position for eight years. In 1997, Laura became a member of the IRMS staff and was tasked with developing and maintaining the Medical Center's Internet and Intranet Web sites – among the first VA sites in the nation. Recently, Laura returned “home” to the Director's Office where she continues her role as the Miami VA Healthcare System's Webmaster, under the supervision of Susan Ward, Public Affairs Officer, and in coordination with Elizabeth Bunn, VISN Webmaster, and the VISN Web Team.

### *Merci del Toro, Public Affairs Specialist*

Merci del Toro, Public Affairs Specialist, was born in Puerto Rico and at age 14 moved with her family to the Washington, DC metropolitan area. There, she attended George Mason University in Fairfax, VA, where she received a B.A. in History with a minor in Spanish. Soon after graduation, Merci started her Federal government career at the Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) National Office. However, in 1989, Merci joined newly-elected Congresswoman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen's Washington staff as Ileana's scheduler and personal assistant. Merci's career has also included serving as an assistant to Sargent Shriver, the former CEO of Special Olympics International. Prior to moving to Miami in 2002, Merci held various analyst positions back at the IRS, including program manager for the IRS Advisory Council in the Office of Public Liaison and Administrative Officer to the Director, e-file for Business Office. She began her VA career in 2004 as the secretary to the Chief, Nutrition and Food Service.

## Miami VA Healthcare System Leadership

Stephen M. Lucas  
*Director*

John R. Vara, MD  
*Chief of Staff*

Paul D. Magalian  
*Associate Director*

Kathryn (Ginger) Ward-Presson, R.N., B.S.N., M.S.N.  
*Associate Director for Nursing Care*

Michael C. Jorge, Ph.D.  
*Assistant Director*

## Newsletter Production Team

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*Illustrator/Designer*